

# Preparing the next generation of learners

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Hannah Christini concludes the section featuring young people's experiences of changing technology and links this to her choice of becoming a teacher. She highlights that critical literacy and critical digital skills will be important components of her teaching practice.

## Technology—a double-edged sword

I am a 20-year-old university student currently studying my third year and final semester of my Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree, specialising in primary education. I am a Pākehā woman with Māori whakapapa and I grew up with my two parents and younger sister in a small suburb in central Auckland. When I reflect on my childhood, I had a very unique experience given the emergence of new technology in my generation. When my family first got the iPod Touch, I was no longer limited to a computer monitor. I now had access to everyday use of a handheld device. I would spend hours exploring various applications while gaining new information about this technology. I no longer had to dial the landline and hope my friends would be the ones to pick up the phone. I could instantly message the friend I wanted to talk to. This excitement of instant messaging was somewhat short-lived. Over time, I felt and experienced the harm of cyberbullying. There was greater ease with which a person could anonymously abuse another person on a device. As I was among the first generation to use such modern technology, I lacked knowledge in navigating such situations. I often left bullying issues to continue rather than seeking help.

While technology proved both beneficial and harmful in my personal life, I discovered it was valuable to meet my needs as a learner. Throughout my primary education, I often struggled to engage in learning tasks limited to reading information and writing words to demonstrate my understanding. The arrival of technology in my education changed this for me. I suddenly had access to tools and resources that presented information in visually engaging ways, influencing me to show more interest in my learning. However, the emergence of this technology was new and unexplored. As a child among

the first generation to utilise this type of technology, there needed to be more guidance on how to use it. More specifically, I needed skills to decipher what was factual and what was misinformation. No-one in my everyday life could teach me the skills and knowledge of how to navigate the information. At that stage, everyone around me was learning how to use this modern technology, and, as a result, I missed opportunities to learn how I could critically analyse information.

## **The decision to become a teacher**

With 3 years of secondary school left, I had already decided I wanted to be a primary teacher. There were multiple reasons I was confident in my decision. However, the most prominent one was due to the positive and negative effects the teachers throughout my education had on me as a learner. At various stages in my education, I had teachers who were intentional with their practice and compassionate in their approach. They cared about my learning progress, valued my contributions to the classroom environment, and were proactive in supporting me in the areas of my learning that were more difficult. However, there were also teachers whose practice contrasted with this, and I was therefore left feeling as though I was unteachable and less capable of improving in comparison to my peers. This isn't to say that these teachers didn't teach well, but their teaching style wasn't beneficial to me as a learner. While these negative experiences at the time were harmful to my self-efficacy and self-esteem, they ignited a spark in my desire to be a teacher.

The older I became, the more reflective I was about how influential my teachers were in shaping who I became as a learner. If I continued to feel unteachable and excluded from my learning, it was likely that I would gradually pull away from wanting to learn. While I was fortunate that I found a greater desire to learn, some learners do continue to feel discouraged in their learning. When I think about why I wanted to become a teacher, it was so that I could help more learners feel supported, seen, and heard. I want to be a teacher because those who have diverse learning needs should feel included in their classroom (Clark-Howard, 2019). The technology we have today allows for this. However, it's a matter of how learners understand how to use technology that is most important to recognise (Ministry of Education, 2017).

## **Educating learners on misinformation**

To ensure that my future learners feel a sense of inclusivity within my classroom, I aim to teach learners how to use the benefits of information online to enhance their lives without harming other people in the process. As learners progress through their education, they gain more independence and responsibility. When considering technology, they can gradually explore more information and understand various perceptions of particular topics. Learners need skills in navigating the vast amount of information online to ensure that they can find reliable sources and avoid misinformation. Mis- and disinformation can heavily influence how learners communicate with others as it shapes how they articulate their ideas (Anderson & Rainie, 2017). In some contexts, this could be harmful to specific people. Integrating critical literacy and critical digital skills (Bolstad, 2017; Gibbs et al., 2022) are two areas I will educate my future learners on, including how to analyse the information they discover, and avoid mis- and disinformation.

I aim to build critical literacy and critical digital skills (Education Review Office, 2020; Gibbs et al., 2021) in my teaching practice when teaching lessons across various curriculum areas. When working alongside learners who use technology to discover information, I will create opportunities for learners to understand and practise critical literacy. This may involve exploring texts in literacy where they must analyse and evaluate the information they are reading (Luke, 2001). I will scaffold their learning by prompting them to question the biases and assumptions that they come across. Critical digital skills (Digital Skills Aotearoa, 2021) might entail learners participating, for example, in a social sciences unit where they learn to compare and contrast different sources of information to verify that what they find is reliable and relevant (Abbiss, 2016). I can model these skills to my future learners by showing them how to check for citations, cross-check different resources that explore the same information, and investigate the expertise of the person or organisation who compiled the resource.

## **Navigating the world of the future**

As technology advances, learners will gradually have greater access to more information. They need to know how to navigate the information they see and read online as it prepares them to become responsible citizens in our society

(Abbiss, 2016). When learners come across information online, how the curators of these resources present ideas can have varying degrees of influence on that learner. It informs their perspectives on topics and contributes to how they communicate with others. If learners have yet to gain experience developing skills to avoid mis- and disinformation, they may impart knowledge about specific people that could be harmful towards them (UNESCO, 2023). However, if learners are provided opportunities to evaluate and question the information they come across, they are introduced to multiple ways of perceiving this information and can, therefore, make informed decisions (Gibbs et al., 2021).

For learners in Aotearoa New Zealand, the extent of cultural diversity is rapidly increasing (Office of Ethnic Communities, 2016), and we are now adapting our national curriculum to ensure a sense of inclusivity for every learner (Gibbs et al., 2022). Educating learners on analysing mis- and disinformation is more critical now than before. If learners are provided with the tools and skills to avoid mis- and disinformation, they are more likely to steer clear of contributing to the stereotyping and discrimination that mis- and disinformation do to minority groups. As a teacher, when considering my future learners, I want to encourage them to be capable of understanding digital etiquette (Ribble, 2021) when exploring information and protecting their privacy so that they feel empowered to make safe and responsible decisions online. I hope that my future learners grow to become citizens in our community who can uplift those in minority groups and understand the harm that misinformation can do to them.

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